VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

FEBRUARY 1989 ONE DOLLAR

Editor's Page

My friend Brenda and her husband baby-sat an iguana a couple of summers ago. The reptile is the pet of a young friend of theirs, a 10-year-old animal lover. It seems that the boy is allergic to the fur of most normal pets, so his parents allowed him to befriend reptiles and amphibians. As a result, the boy has become a herpetologist of some note, especially in the younger circles.

Brenda jokes about how the iguana settled right into their home life during its stay, to the point that she and her husband started wishing the beast good morning on their way out of the house each day. Most people, I'm sure, would have locked the reptile up in a closet and fed it lettuce and water under the door twice a day. Still, I guess that proves that a little open-mindedness and a gentle nature goes a long way with cold-blooded guests.

It is strange how our perceptions of reptiles and amphibians change as we grow older. Usually, the fascination that most kids have with snakes and turtles and lizards is condoned, if not encouraged (though I do admit that my mother locked all the windows and doors of our house and threatened my life one afternoon when a fellow reptile fancier brought a rather large, harmless specimen over for me and the rest of the neighborhood to admire), but more often than not, any love for cold-blooded creatures evolves from "cute" to "eccentric" by the time one reaches the teenage years. An adult with a fancy for reptiles and amphibians probably spends an unjustified amount of time proving his moral fiber to strangers. It makes no sense.

My friend, the noted herpetologist Chris Pague, says that the aversion and downright hatred of reptiles and amphibians is a learned behavior. Now, that makes sense. Children *are* apt to show more than a passing interest in those smoothskinned creatures that have the ability to shed their skins and grow new limbs, and may bring home turtles in their pockets regularly, but somehow that all changes as we get older.

Perhaps part of it is that we realize such creatures have the ability to harm us and we don't feel nearly as invincible as we did at nine years old, when we took to capturing huge yellow and black bumblebees with our hands and pulling their wings off to watch them spin and buzz on the ground.

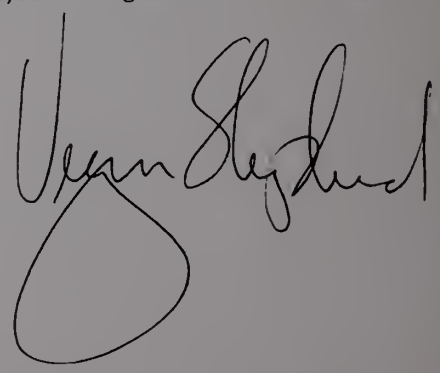
But, to be fair, when we're young, nobody much reinforces our affection and respect for those cold-blooded creatures that spend so much of their time simply warming up on a log or a nice flat rock, either. I mean, Beatrix Potter never painted flattering portraits of black snakes or told stories of spotted salamanders. Of course, we've got the frog that turned into a Prince, but the whole point of the story seems to be that it's a curse to be a toad. About the best story I ever heard as a kid was that horned toads spit blood from their foreheads. I desperately wanted one of those creatures for my own, but they eluded the hunting tactics of even the most renown reptile catchers of the schoolyard. That did add depth to the mystery of the toad that is really a lizard, and the creature grew substantially in mythic stature.

Still, that youthful fascination is normally replaced, as we grow older, with a vile, shuddering aversion to things without hair. Chris and I agree that the worst fate you could wish upon an enemy is to come back as a reptile in a suburban area. That despicable person would most surely meet a just fate from a savagely wielded garden hoe, or something equally as nasty. It's a given in our society: Kill 'em first; ask questions later.

Recently, I had the opportunity to quiz some intelligent, schooled, outdoorsy people on how they would handle the situation if someone called them on the phone, frantic because hundreds of baby snakes were invading their house. (This, by the way, is not that unusual a scenario here at the Game Department. With new houses and buildings going up all over the place, the chances of a new building site being plopped down near recently deposited snake eggs becomes a real possibility.) Without exception, all six of the men advised either calling an exterminator or dispatching of the snakes themselves. Not one person advised holding out to identify whether or not the snakes were dangerous to life and limb, by perhaps evacuating all the people and calling in a local herpetologist. I've gotten some flak from people I've told this story to, most saying the question was unfair and that most people *would* take the wise, safe route to get rid of the intruders. Well, maybe so. Still, I'd like to know what Brenda's 10-year-old friend would have done.

But, to be truthful, it makes me uncomfortable to wonder what would happen if, say, I came across a 60 lb. snapping turtle thoughtfully lugging itself across a road. I'm wondering if I would pull him off the road by his tail, like Brenda has done before, to keep him from getting wickedly squashed by one of us. I'm wondering if I learned enough from my childhood.

Perhaps, though, there's a simpler answer to it all. Perhaps all we need is to spend some time in the company of an iguana once in a while. □



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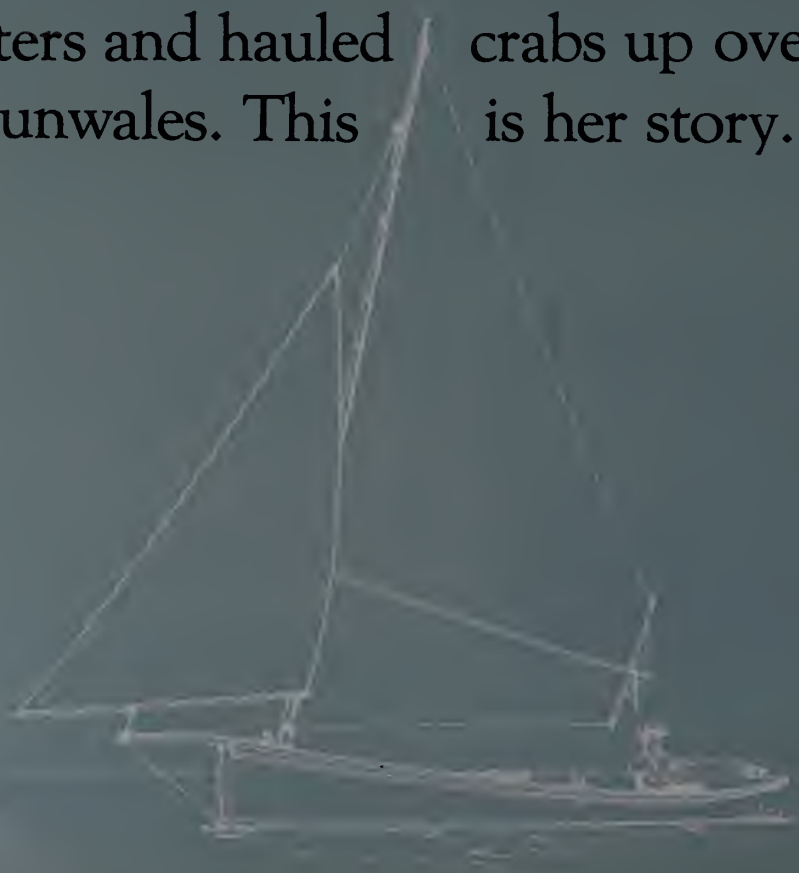
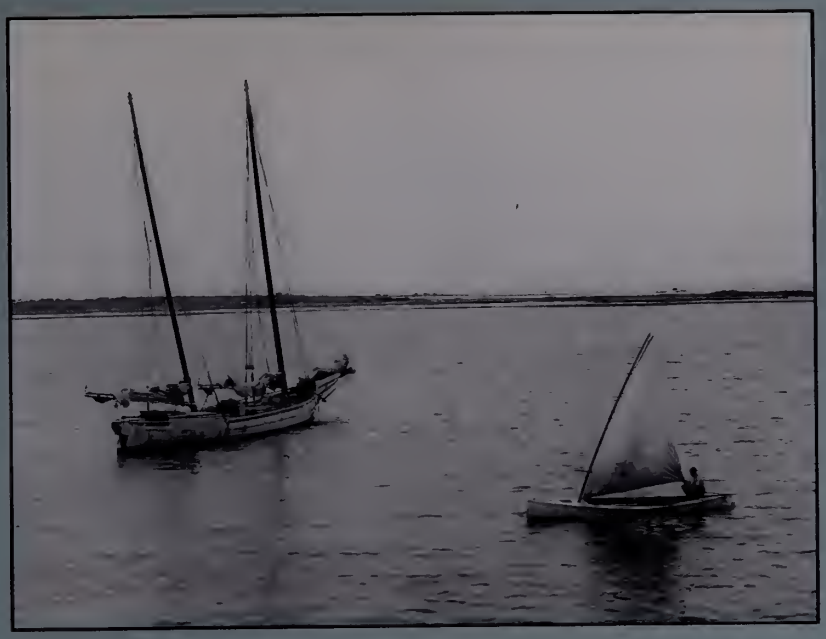
Of Sails & Oars & Yesterday
The Chesapeake Bay Crabbing Skiff

A hundred years ago, a small working boat graced the waters of the Bay with her sails, while fishermen tonged for oysters and hauled crabs up over her gunwales. This is her story.





A Chesapeake Bay crabbing skiff maneuvers around a bugeye schooner in Monday Creek, VA . . . in the good old days.

Skimming along under sail or resting quietly at anchor, the Chesapeake Bay crabbing skiff was for decades one of the foremost trademarks of the Chesapeake Bay. Though seldom seen nowadays except in a museum or a replica built for day sailing, these sturdy, efficient little crafts were a common sight from Baltimore to Norfolk earlier in the century.

Like the horse and buggy or the old hand water pump, the crabbing skiff represented an era on the bay when life was a great deal simpler. A bayman could make a good living by farming a little piece of land and fishing as a sideline. Or he could turn it around and spend the greater part of his time on the water. Whichever, the dependable crabbing skiff, ranging in length from 17 to 35 feet, was his key to getting all or a part of his living from the bay.

Baymen usually powered their skiffs by sail set on stayless masts. But being light, the boats were also easily rowed, sculled or simply poled. Working in shallow water, it was often more convenient to slosh ahead on foot with the tie-up line over one shoulder and lead the shallow-draft craft as one would a plow horse. As one observer put it, "The skiff was for the waterman what a mule was for a dirt farmer. Cheap to own, easy to keep and endlessly useful."

Until a generation or so ago, many of the crabbing skiffs could still be found, converted to gasoline power and still working or rotting idly in some backwater. Fortunately, a few people had forethought enough to recover and preserve some of the old hulls before they disappeared completely.

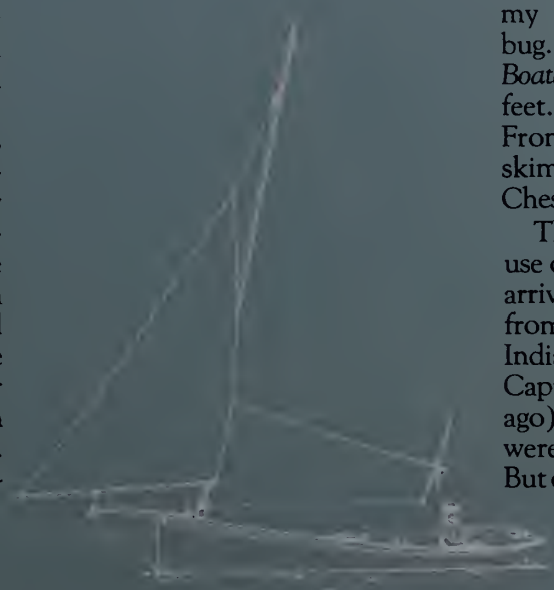
by Hugh D. Stevens

photos courtesy of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum

Howard I. Chapelle, Curator of Transportation at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and connoisseur of small sailing craft, scoured the Bay and found a number of the old skiffs enough intact to make hull measurements. In 1943, he published an accounting of his findings in articles which appeared in the June and October issues of *Yachting*. Some of the hulls were saved and are now on display at several museums around the bay.

It was Chapelle who brought about my own infection with the "sailing bug." Inspired by his enduring classic, *Boatbuilding*, I built a sailer under 20 feet. The boat lived up to its name. From it I learned the sweetness of skimming along under sail in a real Chesapeake Bay skiff.

The crabbing skiff first came into use on the Bay in the 1870s. Before its arrival, the log canoe (actually hewn from logs, a method evolved from the Indian's dugout building, described by Captain John Smith three centuries ago) and the round-bottomed yawl were the popular craft for watermen. But difficulty in getting suitable timber



Chesapeake Bay crabbing skiffs and log canoes were the "workhorses" of the Bay in the early 1900s.

for the log canoe and the cost of round-bottom yawl construction had already made circumstances ripe for a change.

It is believed that the crabbing skiff had its origin in a boat that came far away from the bay.

"I have heard," Chapelle wrote "that a boat named *Frolic* was picked up adrift by a Taylor's Island schooner. She was a long, narrow, flat-bottomed skiff with a round stern and two leg-of-mutton sails."

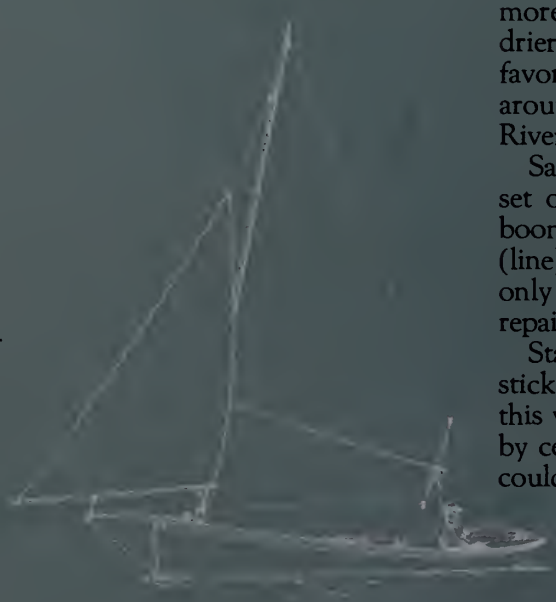
"From the description," Chapelle continued, "this might have been a New Haven [Conn.] sharpie lost by a Yankee schooner in the bay for a load of oysters."

Frolic's steadiness, reasonable carrying capacity, low building costs, good sailing and rowing qualities immediately caught the attention of baymen. And, in the years that followed, numbers of skiffs patterned after the sharpie sprang into use on the bay. Cheap and easy to build and maintain, they became the mainstay for thousands of baymen for oyster tonging, fishing, waterfowling and other needs.

In hard shell crabbing, a trotline of heavy twine, several hundred yards in length, was set with a buoy and anchor at each end. Chunks of scrap beef, pork or fish were tied at intervals. With the trotline passed over the gunwales of the skiff, the fisherman slowly pulled the line along, dip-netting the crabs clinging to the bait. Trotline fishing was done in the same manner by substituting baited hooks for hunks of meat.

For soft shell crabs, the fisherman worked along the water's edge, wading and towing the skiff, or standing up in the boat and moving it along by oars or pole.

Flat-bottom boats, more stable for a person standing, were better suited for crabbing. The same was true for oyster tonging, since the fishermen stood at the gunwale working his tongs off the bay bottom to pick up the oysters.



Though flat bottoms were more stable for stand-up work and could carry more sail and greater loads, there were disadvantages. They were slow coming about when changing tack. This not only caused loss of headway but presented a real danger of swamping in rough water. In addition, flat bottoms slap, or pound, heavily when taking waves, sending up showers of spray and making for a wet ride. V-bottom hulls, like the log canoe and round-bottomed yawl, were much more stable in rough water and gave a drier ride. Hence, V-bottoms were favored for choppy waters like that around the mouth of the Choptank River.

Sails were generally leg-of-mutton set on stayless masts with the sprit boom attached at the mast by a snotter (line) rover to the mast. This was not only a simple rig but easy to make or repair.

Stayless masts called for a heavier stick which put more weight aloft but this was more than compensated for by certain advantages. Stayless masts could be shipped and unshipped with

A Chesapeake Bay crabbing skiff at anchor at St. Michaels, MD in 1908. Thousands of these skiffs were built in the early 1900s for crabbing, oystering, and waterfowling. They became a trademark of the Bay.

ease. Instead of reefing (shortening sail) in stiff winds, the sail could be "let go" forward of the mast to reduce pull on the boat and control speed for the working operation. Passage fore and aft of the mast was left unobstructed.

"The stayless mast was also a safety feature," explained Joseph Liener, an old-time bay resident and retired boat builder. "It could bend and spill out heavy gusts of wind that might otherwise tip and swamp the boat."

The orginal sharpie skiff was a one-man, one-masted boat usually under 20 feet in length. Some, however, were constructed to 28 feet. A few, running 35 feet in length, were used for hauling oysters and were manned by a crew of two. Larger boats were adorned with a "clipper bow," and some had a removable trunk cabin. Large or small, the crabbing skiff was a handsome and graceful craft at moor or under sail.

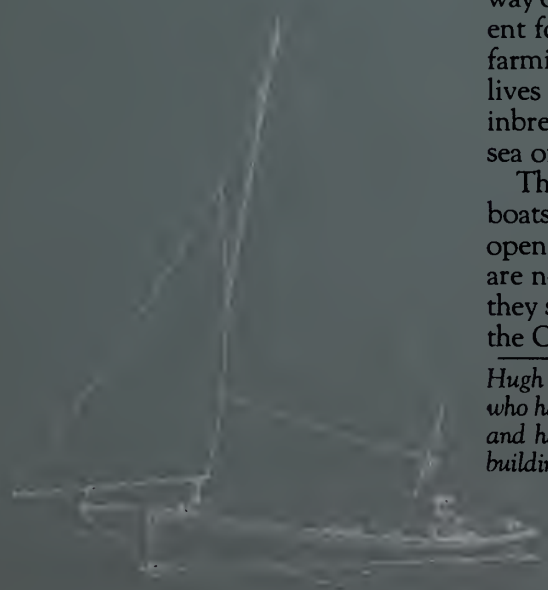
"Literally thousands of these skiffs were built," wrote Frederick Tilp, "making it almost impossible to accurately identify any one type such as a Smith Island Skiff, Hooper Island Boat, or a Cambridge Sloop. Building in Maryland was centered around Smith Island, Bishop's Head, Crisfield, Deal Island, Champ, Oriole, Wyngate and Nanticoke; in Virginia at Saxis, Tangier, Justiceville and Onancock."

For more than two centuries, small rowing and sailing craft were the mainstay of the Chesapeake life. Roads did not come to many of the sparsely populated Tidewater communities. Rivers and creeks were the only outlets for communication with the rest of the world. The bay could not have been settled without the support of these inexpensive small boats to ship out the catch, bring in supplies and communicate the goings-on in the rest of the world.

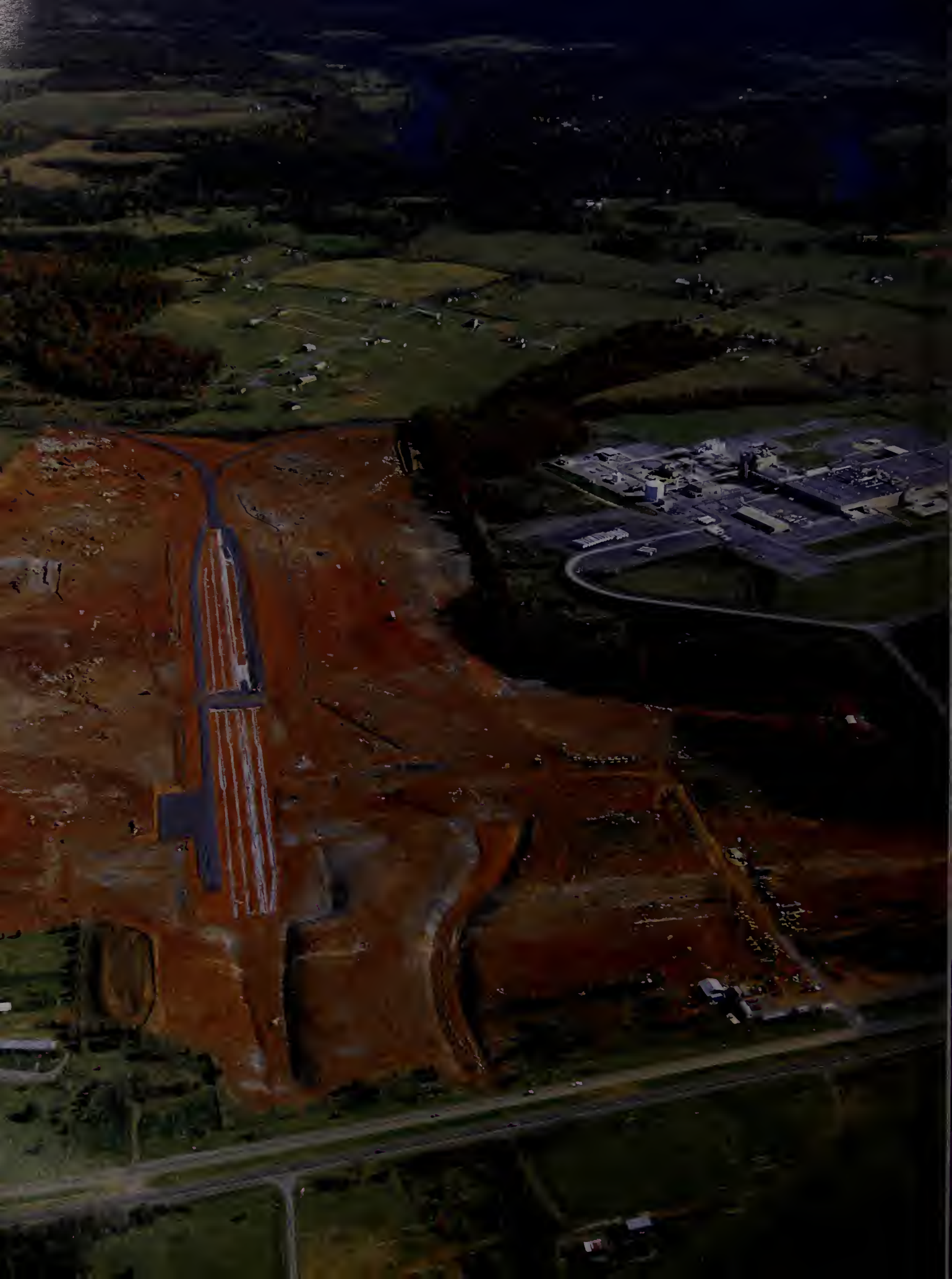
But, eventually, bay ways followed the course of highways as gasoline power moved in. The smooth quiet of oar and sail soon began giving way to noxious sputter and acrid exhaust fumes. Who wanted to sweat at oars or plod along under sail when the jerk of a starter cord could haul bigger loads, move them faster and fetch a quicker dollar?

By the end of the 1930s most of the old sailers had either been converted into gasoline-powered caricatures of their former grace or abandoned to rot in a muddy slough. Thus ended the age of working sail except for the oyster skipjack, required by law to dredge only under sail. Thus, too, ended a way of life on the bay where independent folk could, with a skiff and a few farming tools, quietly pursue their lives through individual skill and inbred understanding of the land and sea of their heritage.

The sails of these little working boats that once silhouetted against the open water and the distant shoreline are now only a thing of memory. But they still remain a foremost symbol of the Chesapeake Bay of yore. □



Hugh D. Stevens is a retired research engineer who has been freelancing articles for 30 years, and has an abiding love for boats and boat building. He lives in Front Royal.



Challenging the Bulldozers

More and more people are questioning the "progress" that turns our land into shopping malls and subdivisions, and the Piedmont Environmental Council is committed to helping us fight to save what's left of our paradise.

by Nancy Hugo

What do you do when your favorite wildflower walk is paved over to be used as a parking lot, or your favorite bird covert is bulldozed to make way for a subdivision? If you do nothing but experience a wave of anger, frustration, and impotence, you have lots of company. For all the Virginians who would like to see Virginia protect more than her dominant species—man, there are only a few who have any idea how to go about it. One group that does is the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC).

Opposite: photo by Melissa Simpson

These pioneers in protecting open space have been around for 17 years. They organized in 1972 when a handful of citizens dedicated themselves to protecting piedmont Virginia from "a tidal wave of growth" and have since grown into an organization with a staff of nine full-time and four part-time employees, including an attorney, economist, planner, and environmental education specialist. PEC now has a budget of over half a million dollars raised primarily through private contributions.

Their first major success was a statewide moratorium on uranium mining; their most ambitious new goal is permanently protecting a million acres of northern piedmont countryside from development. Their methods include a combination of private persuasion and public lobbying, and they have earned a reputation for muscle at both the state and local levels. But for all of their successes, it may be PEC's attitude that most sets them apart from other organizations. In an age in which the phrase "I can do anything I want to with my land" seems to fuel the bulldozers, PEC refuses to see the destruction of privately owned habitat as inevitable.

"We think it can be prevented by organizing private landowners who happen to love and respect their properties for what they are rather than for their maximum economic value," says PEC President Bob Dennis.

Although PEC nominally serves only nine counties in Virginia's northern piedmont (see map), its strategies for preserving open space, protecting groundwater, and managing growth have been models for other parts of the state, and its influence on legislation has been felt statewide. It is largely through PEC's efforts, for example, that watersheds and wildlife habitats have been added to the lands eligible to be included in Agricultural and Forestal Districts, areas established to protect rural economies and community quality.

"Every area needs a PEC," says Richard McNear, Director of Planning and Zoning in Fauquier County for 16

Once the bulldozers start in, all that's left is frustration and despair at the disappearing habitat in the state. The Piedmont Environmental Council is committed to heading off uncontrolled growth and development of our remaining open spaces, through the use of alternatives such as conservation easements that value the preservation of the best of Virginia first; photo by Rob Simpson.

years. "They've been an important motivating, educating, and organizational force in the community. They're not just an anti-bunch."

From its founding, one of PEC's goals has been to press for positive rural preservation planning that would keep them on the offense, protecting land before it was threatened, instead of on the defense, reacting to development proposals as they came along.

"We think that traditionally the areas in Virginia counties that are zoned for agriculture or conservation tend to be those areas left over after they decide where to put the shopping centers, airports, and other stuff. And that's unfortunate," says Bob Dennis. "In too many counties, areas zoned for agriculture are seen as holding zones until a developer comes in with a great idea to build a paper mill or something. We think rural preservation planning is just as important as where you put the shopping centers. No . . . more important."

Dennis has served as president of PEC for eight years, and his presence is symbolic of the qualities that have made PEC so successful. Even his official photos picture him dressed in a casual plaid shirt, and one senses he'd always rather be outdoors. But beneath that plaid shirt beats the heart of a professional who's as comfortable with planning commissioners as with farmers, and as familar with TDR's (transferable development rights) as he is with bobwhite quail. Professional research and technical expertise are, in fact, the hallmarks of PEC's reputation and the organization's awareness of both the technical planning literature and the Code of Virginia is as apparent at meetings of local Boards of Supervisors as it is at hearings of the General Assembly.

There are dozens of strategies PEC has developed in conjunction with local governments to protect open space, but the strategy that Dennis is most excited about is the concept of the Virginia Piedmont Reserve. "It's the thing we are doing that's different from what other groups are doing," says Dennis. "We've looked at the big picture and worked from the bottom up with landowners trying to preserve a large area of the American landscape. And we've made enough progress we've now been recognized nationally."

The President's Commission on America's Outdoors has recognized the Piedmont Reserve as the kind of new generation of land protection concept other communities should consider. In this program, the goals of PEC are to create a Reserve of one million acres of undeveloped land in the nine county area the Council serves. The lands would be protected not by government regulation but by voluntary landowner action, including placing property in conservation easements and forming Agricultural and Forestal Districts.

As PEC sees it, the Virginia Piedmont Reserve is already taking shape. By PEC's count, about 72,000 acres in its nine counties (not including Shenandoah National Park) are protected permanently—37,000 acres by conservation easements and 35,000 acres in "public interest ownership" including state wildlife management areas, properties such as Monticello, and state university research farms. Add short-term Agricultural and Forestal Districts, and the area dedicated to continued rural use totals 360,000 acres—85% more than Shenandoah National Park and one-third the area of the entire George Washington National Forest. Many of the 360,000 acres are available for hunting, fishing and other recreational uses—with prior permission of the landowner.

"In terms of long term protection," says Dennis, "we're convinced easements are the only way to go. Zoning can change overnight. In one election the balance on the Board of Supervisors can change and cause the vote to go from rural preservation to 'pave everything over.' In my own experience, one election screwed up the zoning in Fairfax forever. Changes were made in the zoning ordinance, and the county lost control of the development process."

The conservation easements Dennis has such high hopes for work like this.

"We think rural preservation planning is just as important as where you put the shopping centers. No . . . more important."—Bob Dennis, President, Piedmont Environmental Council.

"The most important thing the community needs to understand is how important open space is economically as well as aesthetically and environmentally. Unbuilt land is like money in the bank."—Georgia Herbert, Fauquier County Board of Supervisors.

A landowner voluntarily gives up some of the rights that go along with ownership of his property in exchange for other advantages. "Ownership of property is like owning a bundle of sticks," explains Dennis. "One stick allows you to cut trees, one allows you to plant a garden, one allows you to keep a cow. Others allow you to put up billboards, to have a junkyard, to run a landfill, to subdivide into small lots. You can identify a lot of sticks. Putting your land in an easement is giving away, to be held in public trust, some of these sticks—the ones that would change the rural character of the property." According to Dennis, a conservation easement not only protects the rural character of the land for future generations, but has economic benefits for the landowner as well.

State law allows counties to guarantee that land under conservation easement will be taxed under Virginia's use-value assessment program. Lands that qualify for use-value assessment are taxed based on their use, not on the price they might bring in the marketplace. A small farm in Albemarle, for example, might be worth $220,000 on the open market, but if it qualifies for use-value assessment, it could be taxed based on a use-value of $49,000.

A conservation easement also helps protect family farms when they pass to the next generation. "Often the per acre value of a family farm has gotten so high, that when the time comes for it to go to the children, the size of the inheritance tax bill forces them to sell the farm to developers to pay the taxes," says Dennis. "Putting an easement on it knocks down the estate tax on the farm."

There is also a one-time tax advantage to granting a conservation easement because any reduction in the market value of the property can be deducted from income taxes as a charitable gift. "It can be deducted just like a gift to the Boy Scouts or the church," says Dennis. Both public agencies, like the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and certain private organizations are allowed to hold easements in Virginia. PEC (28-C N. Main Street, Box 460, Warrenton, Virginia 22186) welcomes questions about conservation easements.

To chart their progress in getting landowners to voluntarily commit their property either to conservation easements or to less restrictive Agricultural and Forestal Districts, PEC staff members keep detailed maps of protected lands in their service region. PEC staff members visit local groups, pointing out to landowners the areas where they have made no visible commitment to farming or open space.

"We try to make them see how much in the public interest it is to preserve open space," Says Tish Fleming, one of PEC's landowner contact people.

This sort of informal lobbying has become something of an art form in these northern piedmont counties. In Clarke, for example, there is an official county easement committee whose job it is to approach landowners and suggest easements as a way of preserving the face of the county. Along the Loudoun-Fauquier border, committees from the Goose Creek Association take tax maps and approach landowners, one by one, asking them to commit their land to Agricultural/Forestal districts or to conservation easements.

Opposition to what PEC is trying to do usually takes two forms. Some critics argue that giving tax advantages to large landowners to protect open space helps wealthy landowners at the expense of other taxpayers. But Georgia Herbert, former PEC staff member and now member of the Fauquier Board of Supervisors, disagrees.

"The most important thing the community needs to understand is how important open space is economically as well as aesthetically and environmentally. Unbuilt land is like money in the bank." Herbert cites a PEC study that found that for every $1.00 of revenue collected from residential land in Culpeper County, it cost $1.25 to provide services to that land. Agricultural and industrial lands, on the other hand, were revenue generators,

Piedmont Environmental Council Service Region

. . . for every $1.00 of revenue collected from residential land in Culpeper County, it cost $1.25 to provide services to that land. Agricultural and industrial lands, on the other hand, were revenue generators, requiring only 19 cents of services for every $1.00 collected in taxes.

requiring only 19 cents of services for every $1.00 collected in taxes.

"Cows don't get on the school bus," explains planner Richard McNear.

According to Georgia Herbert, a vicious circle is created when land is developed for housing. Taxes have to be raised to pay for services, and raising taxes forces farmland into the marketplace. The farmland is divided for residential development which then requires more services, more taxes, and so on. According to Herbert, the only people who come out ahead are the speculators and real estate people who make money selling land. "The community doesn't come out ahead, it doesn't even come out even. If we're serious about wanting to keep agricultural land, historic lands, and wildlife habitat in the state, we have to make it financially possible for the owners of unbuilt land to keep it unbuilt. We can do that by recognizing with financial forgivenesses that they're not contributing to the service demand in the same way a suburban builder is."

"But where will the growth go?" is the next question skeptics ask.

"There are two types of animals that have to be looked out after in this world," says Northern Virginia Building Industries Association president Sid Jacobson. "There's the type that existed on the tract before it was developed and the two-legged variety that need housing at prices they can afford. A balance is going to have to be struck between open space and where people have to live. The people don't go away."

But according to Herbert, "We're not talking about pulling up the bridge over the moat. This community is growing. Our population grew by 17% from 1980-1986."

"We have our designated growth areas, our quarter-acre lots," says McNear. "We're not an exclusive county. It's just that we have parts we want to be devoted to agriculture and parts where we want the growth to go. We think open space and wildlife habitat are an important part of maintaining our quality of life, and we've tried to put some rhyme and reason in the development process."

Bob Dennis notes that even if his organization succeeds in protecting a million acres of undeveloped land in PEC's service area, that leaves fully a million acres for development.

According to Dennis, the counties that are succeeding best at protecting open space are all saying "growth is going to go into the places where we want the people to be—in the towns and villages where there are water and sewer and curbs and gutters on the streets."

"You can't expect to come to Fauquier and have a two-acre lot with a house in the country," says Dennis, "because if everyone did that, we wouldn't have any country."

It is Fauquier, Clarke, Rappahannock, and Albemarle counties that Dennis believes are doing the best jobs of protecting open space in the PEC region. In those counties, not only are landowners protecting their land voluntarily, but rural area zoning helps protect open space. "They are using the zoning ordinance to determine the density of development in rural areas," says Dennis, "and the subdivision ordinance to try to manage—or cluster—that development."

According to Dennis, the simplest expression of this concept is in Rappahannock County, one of the most rural counties in the PEC service region. There the county's zoning ordinance says the basic density in rural areas will be 1 house per 25 acres. "But you don't have to buy 25 acres to build a house," says Dennis. "If you have a 100-acre farm you can sell off three two-acre lots. That way 94 acres stay intact. But you can't buy a farm in Rappahannock County and expect to subdivide it into two-acre lots."

In Fauquier, not only are there large open space requirements in agricultural zones (85% of the land must remain undeveloped), but there are strict requirements as to which land can be built on and which can't. For example, if a landowner owns 500 acres of land in an agricultural zone, the zoning ordinance allows him to put 17 houses on it—theoretically one per 35 acres. But Fauquier's ordinance doesn't allow him to subdivide into 17

"We have a low tax rate, and we've done a better job than our neighbors in protecting the visual amenities. But the more we succeed in accomplishing our objectives, the harder it gets. Everybody wants to live here."—
Richard McNear, Director of Planning and Zoning, Fauquier County.

large lots; he must put 16 of those lots on 15% of the land and the remaining 85% must be deed restricted for agricultural or forest use only. Not only that, but the county can control which part of the acreage will be deed restricted, assuring that flood plains, unique wildlife habitats, sensitive environmental areas, and prime agricultural lands are protected.

Fauquier also has what is called "instant TDR's" or density transfer. This is a planning approach so new in Virginia that no one is quite sure how useful it will prove over time. Development rights in a piece of property can be calculated on the basis of present zoning, and these can be "bought" in the form of an option to purchase an open space easement. For example, if the owner of a farm on the developing edge of Warrenton wanted to develop his land in a way that required more development rights than the zoning allowed, he could approach a landowner in the rural mountains of Hume to buy some of his unused development rights in the form of an easement. In return for giving the easement to the county, the Warrenton farmer would get the right to build additional houses. Once his development rights were sold, the Hume property owner's land would be deed restricted in perpetuity. In theory, this system should protect open space by transferring growth from rural areas to designated growth areas, but it has been little used in Fauquier so far because development pressures haven't been strong enough to create this level of demand for greater density.

Watching and refining planning approaches like those used in Fauquier, improving state enabling legislation, and inventing new mechanisms for protecting open space are all challenges PEC hopes to meet. PEC also tracks new legislation for the counties they serve.

Obtaining more power from the state to allow localities to deal with growth pressures is one of PEC's most difficult goals. Virginia has what is called the Dillon rule, which allows local governments to exercise only those powers expressly granted by the state. Many of the "new generation of planning mechanisms" PEC would like to see localities try will, therefore, require state enabling legislation. Dennis would like, for example, to see the state explore the possibility of a real estate transfer tax (perhaps a 2% tax on real estate transfers of over $100,000) to provide funds to purchase conservation easements. "Other states have shown the value of buying partial interest in critical lands like wetlands and steep slopes as a way of protecting them," he says. "We think it ought to be considered."

According to Dennis, the region of the state served by PEC has been a leader in getting more authority for local governments to deal with growth pressures, but McNear points out that even such success has had a dark side.

"We have a low tax rate, and we've done a better job than our neighbors in protecting the visual amenities," says McNear. "But the more we succeed in accomplishing our objectives, the harder it gets. Everybody wants to live here."

As for the future, Dennis is cautiously optimistic. "Virginians are asking questions," he says. " 'Why are we growing the way we are?' 'Who's benefitting from this growth?' 'Are we paving over our heritage?' And, 'What are we doing to our resources?' "

According to Dennis, the challenge for the 1990s is for Virginians to learn how to protect public resources on private lands, from wildlife habitat to scenery and watersheds. He hopes we'll meet that challenge with mechanisms that are attractive to and supported by private owners, not with approaches that generate distrust and resentment.

"That's what PEC's Virginia Piedmont Reserve concept is all about," he says. "We don't know all the answers yet; we've got a long way to go. But we're learning. How can we help but be optimistic when the owners of one-third of a million acres have demonstrated by voluntarily preserving their lands that they hear and understand our message?" □

Nancy Hugo is a freelance outdoor writer who lives in Ashland.

Grayson County

Sporting History

story & photos
by Bob Gooch

Quaint and peaceful, it isn't much of a place. Grant, Virginia. Several dwellings and a country store. Mostly it's a U.S. Post Office serving miles of sprawling and mountainous Grayson County. Zip code 24341.

You're always in the mountains in Grayson County. You're either on a mountain, just off of one, or about to climb one. It's good Southwest Virginia mountain country. Mountain music, hound dogs, and tall hunting and fishing tales spun around potbellied stoves.

Sliced off of big Montgomery County in 1792, it claimed Virginia's highest country, 5,729-foot Mount Rogers on the Grayson-Smyth County line, and 5,520-foot Whitetop Mountain which it shares with Washington County.

"Grant? Not exactly an old Virginia name. How come?"

Mike Harrington grinned knowingly.

"Back in frontier days, two wagon trails crossed here. A little community eventually developed, but no one thought about a name until an application was put in for a post office. A name was needed and the U.S. Postal Service just called it Grant."

Grant in the southern Appalachians? Hmmmm. . .

A staff photographer for the *Smyth County News* in Marion, 31-year-old Harrington's roots go deep in Grayson County. Longtime residents still speak fondly of his grandfather, Doc Harrington, a beloved family physician who traveled the Grant community on horseback delivering babies, curing the croup, mending broken bones, and in general caring for the health of several generations of Grayson County people.

"A big cat of some kind (some insist it was a panther) almost ended his life early," said his grandson. "He was making a call on horseback when the horse was frightened by the big cat, bucked, and dumped him in an icy creek. Bitter cold, but he managed to climb out and make it to a nearby farmhouse before hypothermia claimed him."

The hunting history of Grayson County is rich in bobcat lore. "We always called them wildcats," said Joe Pugh from the other side of the hot stove in the Grant general store.

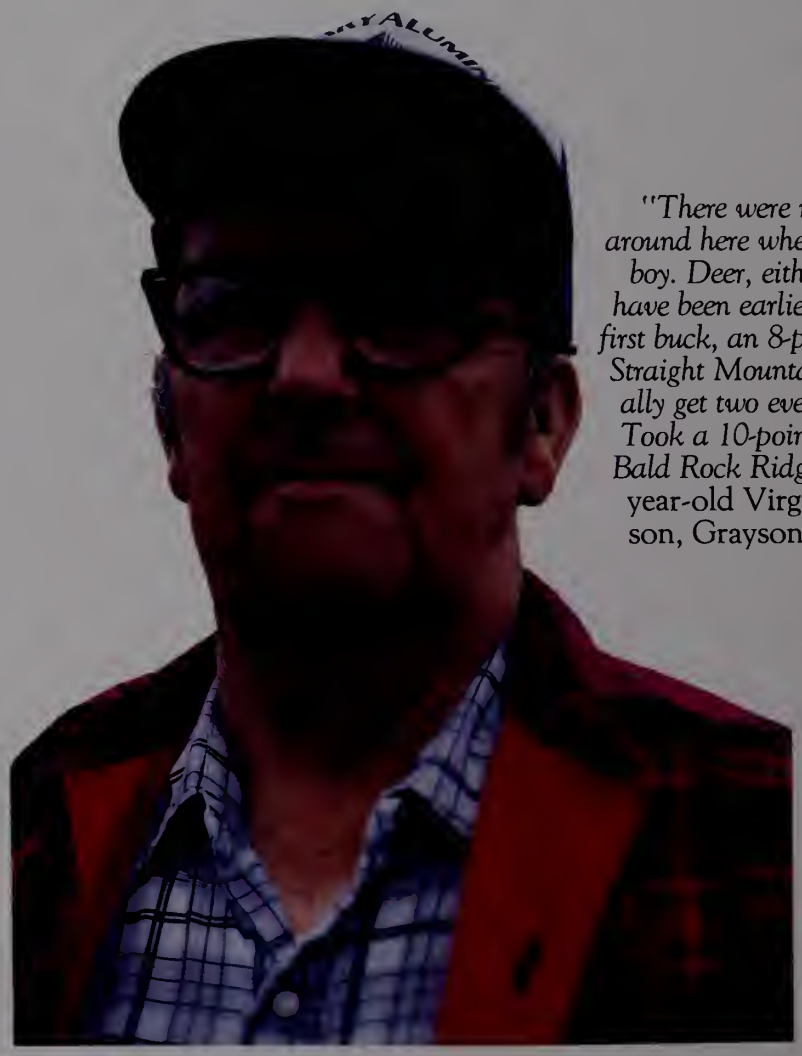
"Buddy of mine got that one," added Sidney Vaught pointing to a feisty mount perched near a stack of bib overalls on a high shelf. "I killed a 23-pounder up on High Tree Rock. Rock was covered with ice and too slick for the dogs to get to the cat."

"Used to hunt them all the time," said the 70-year-old Vaught, "but arthritis has slowed me down. Kept good bluetick hounds. Takes a good dog to trail and stay with a cat. I always hunted in the daytime, not much at night. We treed a few, but mostly we waited for the dogs to run one by for the kill."

"A lot of people still hunt bobcats here," said Harrington.

The flourishing turkey populations, however, now keep county hunters, young and old, excited. "Killed my first turkey the second spring they opened the season," said 74-year-old Virgil Anderson. He and a friend had started hunting together that distant spring morning, but decided to split up. "Was just standing here when this old gobbler opened up. Saw him fly down into a field and start toward me. Just luck. Hadn't yelped a note. I hid in some brush and he came right to me. Killed my first turkey without calling, but I've called in 37 since," he added as he counted his collection of beards. "Don't hunt much in the fall. I like spring hunting."

Over the years Anderson has become an expert caller, and now makes and sells his own box calls. "Cedar is



"There were no turkeys around here when I was a boy. Deer, either. Might have been earlier. Got my first buck, an 8-pointer, on Straight Mountain. I usually get two every season. Took a 10-point buck on Bald Rock Ridge."—74-year-old Virgil Anderson, Grayson County.

fine for the box," he said, "But you need harder wood for the striker. I use cherry or walnut."

"There were no turkeys around here when I was a boy," Anderson continued. "Deer either. Might have been earlier. Got my first buck, an 8-pointer, on Straight Mountain. I usually get two every season. Took a 10-point buck on Bald Rock Ridge."

"Our hunting in the old days was mostly for grouse, rabbits, and squirrels," said Sidney Vaught. "Maybe a few 'coon, but plenty of 'possum. I used to keep a pack of beagles to run rabbits."

"Rabbits were down some this year," threw in Joe Pugh. "We've always had plenty of fox."

Grayson is not known as a bear county, and never has been. "Never saw a bear," said Virgil Anderson.

"Must have been some bears here once," said Sidney Vaught. "The saying goes that the Roberts family moved to Roberts Cove just so they could hunt bears."

"I was always more of a hunter than a fisherman," said Virgil Anderson, "but we had plenty of native trout when I was a boy. Fellar took me trout fishing up on Jerry's Creek. Don't reckon there was a limit then because we caught about 20 trout apiece. Good eating fish."

"We have three of the best trout streams in the state," said Joe Pugh. "Big Fox Creek, Big Wilson Creek, and Middle Fox Creek. They head up in the high country, Big Fox on the north side of Mount Rogers, and Big Wilson on the south side."

"We've had some bigmouth bass too," continued Pugh. "Mostly in the lower part of Big Fox Creek. Were more there before they started stocking trout."

"Let me tell you about a fishing experience I had on Big Fox Creek," offered Sidney Vaught warming to the conversation. "I was sitting on a big rock in the middle of the creek and fishing a worm for suckers. Suddenly something took my bait and started off down the creek. My reel was screeching and the fish was going, but then it turned and headed back up the creek and on past me. I scuffled with that fish for awhile and finally brought in an 18-inch hog sucker."

Joe Pugh joined in. "We've always had plenty of suckers, both hog and white suckers. The old hog has a longer puckered mouth."

"There've been smallmouth bass and rock bass in the New River as long as I can remember," said Vaught. "They've stocked muskies there, now. And we had brook trout long before they started stocking browns and rainbows."

The New River, a part of the National Scenic Rivers System in North Carolina, flows north into Grayson County at Mouth of Wilson, dips back temporarily into North Carolina a few miles east of Mouth of Wilson, and then flows northeast through Virginia into West Virginia. It is a public waterway and Department of Game and Inland Fisheries boat ramps provide good access to it.

Public lands in Grayson County include parts of the Jefferson National Forest, the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, a short section of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and Grayson Highlands State Park. The famous Appalachian Trail passes through the western tip of the county.

Independence is the county seat, highly appropriate for a fiercely independent people who inherited that quality from hardy pioneer ancestors who first ventured into those rugged hills.

And the county newspaper? *The Declaration*.

Why not? □

"A lot of people still hunt bobcats here."—31-year-old Mike Harrington, Grayson County.

Bob Gooch is an outdoor newspaper columnist and author of several books on hunting and fishing. He lives in Troy, near Charlottesville.

FIVE-STAR TR

Virginia has some outstanding trout streams. Bruce Ingram takes a chance at ranking the top five.

by Bruce Ingram

Smith River; photo by Bruce Ingram.

OUT STREAMS

It's a tough question—what are the five best trout streams in Virginia? Should we base our answer on the number of citations that are checked in from an individual waterway? If so, then a put-and-take stream would probably come out on top, even though such a stream can't support a trout fishery from year to year. Or should we base our decision on which streams have the best native trout fishing? This classification of stream, however, rarely gives up a citation.

With the realization that arguments are bound to ensue, we have decided to arbitrarily define "best" as referring to those streams which have the ability to have carry-over trout (either stocked or native) from season to season. Using this criteria, although there is bound to be heated rehetoric about four of the slots in the top five ranking, there is not much question about the number one body of water.

"I think the Smith River is the obvious number one choice," says Jim Davis, manager of Orvis in Roanoke. "The Smith gives you big fish potential with its oversized browns, and the river also gives you all the traits that you would expect a classic stream to offer. Except for the lower stretches of the Smith, the river for the most part is very pristine.

"Another thing that I like about the Smith is that it is a perfect example of run-riffle-pool habitat that you find on big water, freestone rivers. You know, people come to the Smith from all over the country. There aren't many places like the stream in the entire South; the White River in Arkansas would be one that is comparable."

Davis, who also is director of Orvis's fly fishing school in Roanoke, stated that another positive about the Smith is the variety of ways that one can fish it. When water is being released from

FIVE-STAR TR

Philpott Dam, the Smith downstream typically becomes a roaring torrent of water. People in the Martinsville-Bassett areas, localities that are near the river, then often enjoy outstanding success with broken-backed Rapala and Rebel minnow imitations. Yet, when the stream is low, clear, and gently flowing, fly rodders flock to the waterway.

"Someone who enjoys matching the hatch can have a ball on the Smith River," stated Davis. "There have been times when I went there and found two or three kinds of mayflies coming off, as well as some caddis and midges. That kind of action can drive you mad, but it also can be a great deal of fun.

"If you want some general patterns for the various seasons on the river, I would suggest nymphs is size 14 range for the spring; Quill Gordons in size 14, Little Black Caddis in size 16, and Blue Wing Olives in size 18 for the summer; and various Tricos in sizes 24 and 26 for the fall. A five-weight rod would be a good overall choice for the stream."

To find out about the power generation schedule of Philpott Dam, contact the U. S. Corps of Engineers at (703) 629-2432. The importance of doing so cannot be overstated. When the siren sounds at the dam to indicate that water release is imminent, get out of the stream immediately! For information on guides, flies, and current fishing conditions for the Smith, contact Orvis, 19 Campbell Avenue Roanoke, VA 24011 (703) 345-3635. On the "special section" of the Smith River, only single hook artificial lures may be used. Check the Virginia Fishing Regulations pamphlet for more information on this restriction and others.

Davis believes that either the Bullpasture River in northwest Virginia or Mossy Creek near the town of Bridgewater would be sound choices as the

It's not easy to decide which trout stream is better, Mossy Creek near Bridgewater (above) or the Bullpasture River in Highland County (right). The solution? Try them both and decide for yourself; photos by Bruce Ingram.

OUT STREAMS

Commonwealth's second best trout stream. But Wayne Hayes, a computer operator for *The Roanoke Times* says he has no doubt which of the two is the runner-up.

"Next to the Smith River, the Bullpasture is the best trout stream in Virginia," said Hayes. "I go up there several times a year and camp near the river. You can catch plenty of fish during the spring and even into the summer. There have been many days that I caught and released my limit several times over.

"I think a key to doing well on the Bullpasture is being versatile. I always take my fly rod and my spinning outfit when I go there. Sometimes the fish will only take dry flies, and sometimes a Rapala minnow or nightcrawler will be what it takes. On into the summer, you might want to even try small spring lizards. Regarding flies, I think a good all season pattern is a female Adams in a size 14."

Hayes characterizes the Bullpasture as being a typical highlands stream with plenty of huge rocks, waterfalls, and long pools. The river is a little deeper and wider than many mountain waterways, thus explaining why it is able to host holdover trout.

Coming in next in our survey is Mossy Creek, at least in the opinion of Jeff Cutright, former president of Roanoke's chapter of Trout Unlimited.

"Mossy is a fine stream and is different from the typical trout stream in that it flows through farmland," he said. "Over the years, Trout Unlimited (TU) has really worked hard to improve the habitat of the creek by fencing it off to protect the stream from cattle and by planting various forms of cover along the banks. That protection, I believe, is why Mossy is able to support carry-over trout.

"TU members also go to the stream every year and pick up trash, repair the

FIVE-STAR TR

fence, and also talk to the landowners along the creek to get their input on how things are going. It's very important for people to realize that Mossy flows through private land and that fishing is by special permit only."

Frank Webb, an Appalachian Power Company Supervisor from Roanoke, disagrees with Mossy Creek's third place ranking.

"My personal opinion is that from late July until frost, Mossy Creek is the best trout stream in Virginia, he said. And for the year as a whole, I would rank it ahead of the Bullpasture.

"The reason the late summer and early fall period is so good on Mossy is because that is hopper time. For most of the year that stream can be really tough. It seems that your flies are always getting caught in the moss or in the foliage along the stream.The stream is so narrow and you are casting and working in such close quarters that it's sometimes hard to get a good drift. But when those grasshoppers are falling into the stream, those big browns really act up and can just smash a hopper or cricket imitation. Then the fishing simply can't be beaten."

Webb employs either a 7-foot rod with a 4-weight line or a 7-foot, 9-inch Orvis "Far and Fine" with a 5-weight line for Mossy Creek. Any kind of hopper pattern is sizes 10 and 12 will do well as will cricket imitations in sizes 12 through 16. Mossy Creek is restricted to fly fishing only and only two fish per day may be kept. Those two fish must be 16-inches or better. For more information, check your fishing regulations booklet.

For information on current stream conditions on this body of water, contact Mossy Creek Outfitters, P.O. Box 135, 105 N. Main Street, Bridgewater, VA 22812 (703) 828-6424. The establishment can also supply good patterns for Mossy and information about obtaining a special permit. Guided

Number five top trout stream in the state is thought by some to be Whitetop Laurel in Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in Washington County, home to both reproducing rainbows and carry-over browns, in addition to some spectacular scenery; photo by Spike Knuth.

OUT STREAMS

Shenandoah National Park trout streams have the bid for the number four spot of top streams in Virginia. Most of the better streams in the area are designated "catch and release" in order to protect the native brookie populations there; photo by Bruce Ingram.

trips are available as well.

From the individuals I talked to, the consensus was that the streams of the Shenandoah National Park (SNP) also have to be on the top five list. The opinion was that these streams for the most part are so small that is would be unfair to the resource to list just one of these brook trout streams as being the best one in the SNP. With all that in mind, some of the better park streams include the Rapidan, Staunton, and the North Fork of the Moorman River—all of which are "fish for fun" rivers where all trout caught must be released immediately. Other good waters include the Thornton, Conway, and South Rivers. For maps on the SNP, contact Murray's Fly Shop, Box 156, Edinburg, VA 22824 (703) 984-4212.

Far western Virginia and Washington county is the home of our number five stream.

"Whitetop Laurel is an outstanding freestone mountain stream that has reproducing rainbows and carry-over browns," said Frank Webb. "Whitetop also has easy access via an old railroad bed that runs up a mountain and parallels the stream from the town of Damascus.

Everybody says that the first two weeks of June is the best time to fish the stream because of the green drake hatch. But I have gone there at other times and done extremely well with hairwing Royal Wulffs and Royal Trudes in sizes 10 though 14."

Although considerable heat can be generated when discussing the makeup of the Old Dominion's top five trout waters, there can be no arguments on at least two points. The state has many quality rivers and creeks, and this year all of us can enjoy visiting our individual favorites. □

Bruce Ingram is the Virginia editor for Outdoor Life *magazine and a frequent contributor to* Virginia Wildlife.

by Bob Gooch

There's No Tougher Sport

Trapping makes hunting and fishing look like child's play.

Hunting and trapping are rich Virginia traditions that we too often take for granted. They are intertwined and inseparable in our outdoor heritage. Yes, I trapped as a youngster, and yes, I bought my first cheap .22 rifle with the profits

from an after-school trapline.

Many rural youths of my generation trapped—mostly for fun—but muskrats, opossums, and an occasional mink or weasel put money in usually empty pockets. The trapping bug is strong. Over the centuries it has led men to the most remote corners of this continent. It never dies. Once you get it, you're infected for life. Even today I occasionally find the time to run a modest trapline.

There were few beavers or raccoons in Virginia during my boyhood days. Good wildlife management, supported by hunters and trappers who willingly shell out hard-earned dollars for licenses, has brought back these critters, and at the same time provided a better environment for those we never lost. As a result, there is a rich renewable resource out there today in Virginia's marshes and woods, along her streams and roaming her remote hollows and meadows. A resource created by good wildlife management—and one that is underharvested.

Beaver, bobcat, fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, otter, and raccoons are the protected furbearing animals in Virginia, mammals which the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries favors with closed seasons and other regulations. Unprotected are skunks and weasels, animals whose fur has limited value in the market.

While the more dedicated trap season after season, regardless of how high or low fur prices might be, others become inactive when the market is down. Viewed in the light of the value of its pelt, the bobcat has been the most attractive to trappers in recent seasons. Its fur commands a good price, but the season limit is only six animals. Mid-range valuewise have been beaver, fox, mink, otter, and raccoon. Beaver, fox, mink, and otter have commanded slightly higher prices than the raccoon, and our native grey fox is generally more desirable than the red. At the bottom are muskrat, nutria, opossum, and skunks. Some fur buyers refuse opossum and skunks, and a market for weasels is hard to find.

Though near the bottom in the price their pelts command in the market,

A selection of leghold traps, from size 1 to 3. Size 1 leghold traps will hold fox, mink, muskrat, opossum and skunks, while size 1½ or 2 traps are best for raccoons. For beaver, size 3 is preferred.

muskrats are a favorite of Virginia trappers because of their abundance. They make up in volume what they lack in value. Beaver, nutria, and raccoons are also abundant, but to a lesser degree. Nutria, an exotic species, are limited to the Back Bay area. Opossum are plentiful, of course, and so are skunks. Neither the mink, nor its close kin the otter, seems to reach abundant levels, but their numbers are usually stable.

Unfortunately in some areas, the abundance of these animals occasionally brings cries for help from landowners, ironically often those who oppose hunting and trapping. Beaver, for example can level stands of timber along streams, flood pastures with their dams—and even flood private and public roads. They can also devastate corn and other crops along waterways. Muskrats also destroy crops and eat out valuable waterfowl marshes. And tunneling into earth dams, they threaten small impoundments such as farm ponds.

The fox gets plenty of blame when small game populations dip alarmingly, but most all furbearing critters prey to some degree on quail, rabbits, and other popular game, particularly on nests and the young.

There is a good deal of trapping done in the Commonwealth, particularly during those seasons when furs command high prices in the market. But, even then there are big chunks of good fur country that seldom see a trapper. Viewed statewide, the fur resource, a healthy renewable one, is underutilized.

Enjoying a small trapline as an avocation or simply as an opportunity to get outdoors requires no great outlay in equipment. Most hunters or fishermen already own much of what is needed—warm clothing, rain gear, boots, a knife, ax, a day or fanny pack, and a little .22 caliber rifle or handgun. Add a dozen or so traps, name tags for the traps (they are required by law), some wire, a few nails and staples, your spouse's garden trowel, and some trapping scents and you are ready to go. For stream trapping, hip boots (which you probably already own) are helpful, but on dry land, regular hunt-

ing boots are fine. You should add rubber gloves for handling the traps, preferably the elbow-length kind available at most trapping supply houses. On larger waters you may have to bring your canoe or john boat into play—getting some additional use out of it. And, you will need a trapping license.

Trap sizes always befuddle those approaching trapping for the first time. Actually, size 1 leghold traps will hold the great majority of Virginia furbearers, particulary the more abundant ones such as fox, mink, muskrat, opossum, and skunks. They will also handle raccoons, but if you plan extensive 'coon trapping, lay in a good supply of size 1½ or 2. For beaver, you're better off with size 3 traps, although I've caught some big beavers with size 2 leghold traps. Part of the secret in holding furbearers in your traps is to use drowning sets when possible, and on land secure your traps to brush or saplings, something that provides flexibility instead of a dead pull. Much the same principle as using the flexible tip of a fishing rod to wear out a big fish.

Conibear, or killer traps, humane though they are, can be a threat to domestic animals such as hunting dogs and pets. They should be used with caution in farming or heavily populated country. A possible exception is water, where they can be used safely. Choose size 110 for muskrats and 330 for beaver.

The value of the fur crop in Virginia varies considerably from year to year depending upon whether fur prices are up or down, and how active trappers are. Over the past decade it has ranged from a little less than two million dollars to in excess of four million dollars. This is no insignificant item in the economic life of the state. As a trapper you might even help with the federal trade deficit! We ship millions of dollars in furs to other countries. Historically, Europeans have looked to America and Canada for their fur needs.

Trapline operations vary considerably depending upon the nature of the country. Back Bay trappers depend heavily upon muskrats and nutria. Consequently, they live off of water

sets, traveling mostly by boat. Hip boots are an integral part of their equipment. High in the hills, however, the trapper travels by jeep and on foot to check his bobcat, fox, and raccoon sets. In between, there are the stream trappers who alternate between canoes or john boats and hip boots. Much depends upon the size of the stream. A trapper will go on foot if the stream is small, often forgoing hip boots in favor of knee-high boots or even rubber-bottom hunting boots.

Few hunters can boast a better understanding of their quarry than can the trapper. Success demands that he know the animal, its feeding and traveling habits, and the kind of territory it prefers. Does it follow waterways or stick to the high country? Crack hunting dogs and modern firearms give the hunter advantages the trapper seldom enjoys. He must lure or trick his wary quarry into a trap. That can be difficult. Tough.

You have to outwit the animal, outwit it in *its* territory. But, read what you can, ask plenty of questions, keep your eyes and ears open, and go for it. Bit by bit you will put it all together.

I like water sets for the beginner because water can conceal a multitude of mistakes. Human scent, for example, that the novice is likely to leave at his set, will be washed quickly away. Water also conceals the trap effectively. Ice or high water, unfortunately, can render water sets temporarily inoperative. They are best early in the season when the water is more likely to be open.

I also feel beginners should go with blind sets initially, for much the same reason. It takes some experience to effectively bait sets or to use scents to lure animals into a trap. A deftly concealed trap set along a well-used trail, though, can take a lot of fur. Use the garden trowel to dig a small depression in the trail, set the trap so it is flush with the ground, and cover it with natural materials such as leaves or other debris. Or make a water set at the foot of a slid where beaver and muskrat have been entering a stream. Cover it if you can, but it really isn't necessary. Another simple set is to locate a log crossing a stream, chop a notch in it, set your trap in the depression, and cover it with leaves or other natural materials.

"Trapping is no once-a-week undertaking. By law you must visit your traps daily. That means in blizzards as well as sunshine, and on Sundays, and holidays as well as on work days."

Trapping is no once-a-week undertaking. By law you must visit your traps daily. That means in blizzards as well as sunshine, and on Sundays, and holidays as well as on work days. You'll enjoy those daily hikes along a trapline, and the constant exposure translates into opportunities to enjoy all kinds of wildlife. I've watched wood ducks barrel up a stream and drop well within shotgun range, listened to squirrels bark at my intrusion, watched deer bound away, and once stood spellbound as a pair of geese dropped honking out of a thick fog to alight on a tiny beaver pond. They, too, were well within shotgun range. Even so, I rarely hunt out there on a trapline. I could, I suppose, but . . . trapping in itself provides all the excitement I am out there for.

By all means, draw a rough map of your trapping territory, showing the locations of all your sets. You may need it to jog your own memory occasionally, but primarily it's an emergency measure. In the event you become sick or incapacitated, you can give it to a friend who can run your trapline, remove any animals it holds, and trip your traps. You don't want to leave any trapped animals out there for long.

If by now the bug has bitten, visit the local library and check out a good general book on trapping. You'll find enough there to get you started. If the library can't help, write or call *Fur-Fish-Game*, America's oldest trapping magazine, at 2878 E. Main Street, Columbus, OH 43209, (614) 231-9585 and order a copy of *The Complete Book of Trapping* by Bob Gilsvik. It sells for $10.95 and they'll accept your Mastercard or Visa. Gilsvik is also an angler and a hunter, but trapping is his passion. He, too, was once a beginner.

And, oh yes, he'll tell you how to trap coyotes. The sly and elusive animals are moving slowly but surely into Virginia and bringing with them an exciting new trapping challenge. □

Bob Gooch is an outdoor newspaper columnist and author of several books on hunting and fishing. He lives in Troy, near Charlottesville.

Habitat

Nancy Hugo

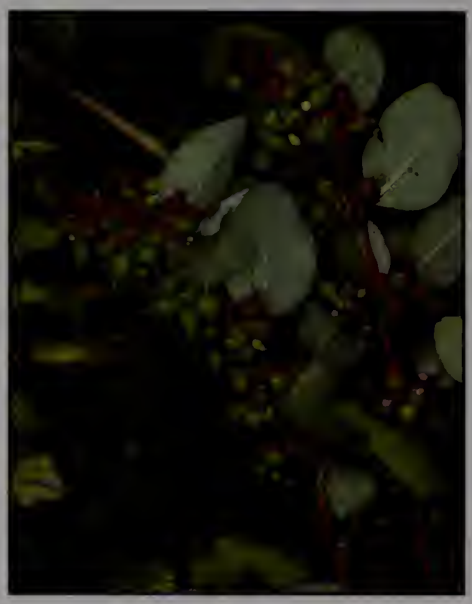
Coralberry

Rabbit apples, rabbit apples, rabbit apples. To me, these will always be rabbit apples. That's the name I learned for the clustered berries on these twiggy shrubs of fields and dry woods, and that's what I intend to continue calling them. Coralberry is what the books usually call them, but I've never heard anyone call them that. Even my elderly neighbor who knows everything didn't help much when I asked him what they were really called. "We just call them 'them ole red berries', " he explained.

Actually, the berries of these valuable wildlife plants are neither red nor the color most of us think of as coral. They're the color of cranberry sauce. So laden are the twigs with berries in the fall that they often bend beneath their weight, forming a web of tangled arches it's almost impossible to walk through. To wildlife these dense thickets offer both protective cover and food.

It's been estimated that 25 species of birds use *Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* as food, among them the bobwhite, cedar waxwing, grosbeak, robin, and thrush. Game birds like the ruffed grouse also eat the berries, and deer browse the small oval leaves which often remain on the twigs well into the winter. The plant also offers food for the larval stage of the hummingbird moth—the moth that hovers around summer flowers looking for all the world like a hummingbird.

The plants, which grow 2-4′ in the wild, have been recommended for years as good plants to use for erosion control because they'll survive on steep slopes and other difficult sites. They're also great plants for the garden, although they're not used as much now as they used to be. The 1923 *National Geographic Society Book of Wildflowers* listed coralberry as "one of America's favorite decorative shrubs," but I've seldom seen it used in gardens.



The fruit of Symphoricarpos oribiculatus *is well-liked by grouse, bobwhite, cedar waxwing, grosbeak, robin and thrush. Even deer have been known to browse on coralberry leaves in the winter. Above; photo by Rob Simpson. Below; photo by Nancy Hugo.*

It should be used more. Peter Larson, a Caroline County wildflower gardener, has a small hedge of it growing along the path to his back door. "Quail come up into it almost to the back door," he says. Sarah Wright says it's been in her Ashland garden as long as she can remember. "It's invasive," she says, "but you can keep it contained. It spreads by underground runners. They're not too hard to pull up, but they do run."

"Good-natured" is the way one old garden book describes it, because it's not finicky about soil conditions. It will grow in red clay under dry exposed conditions, and it does equally well in sun or light shade. Where it will be of most value to wildlife is in settings where it can be allowed to spread to form dense masses.

A white species of Symphoricarpos, *Symphoricarpos alba*, is also a valuable wildlife shrub. It has big round white berries that account for its common name snowberry, and it's a great plant to light up a shady area. It makes a good thicket even in deep shade and thrives in dry soil.

Symphoricarpos plants can be propagated by seeds, cuttings, or division. Carroll Nurseries in Warminister, Maryland (1-800-638-6334) sells 18-24″ plants of three species including a variegated cultivar for about $8.75 each. At such prices some rural landowner with fields of it could become millionaires, so you might want to approach one of them as a plant source.

Other common names for our native Symphoricarpos include Indian current, low woodbine, buck bush, snapberry, and turkey-berry. The Ojibwa Indians used a decoction of it to treat sore eyes and called it "gussigwakamesh." Translated, I'm sure that means rabbit apples. □

Etc.

Letters

Even Though It's Late

Keep 'em coming! What a fabulous publication! The magazine reaches me up to three months late, but it does not distract from the enjoyment I receive in reading each issue cover to cover. I appreciate the breadth of topics covered, the in-depth writing, and, of course, the superb photography. I relive my happy youth in some small way in each issue. I was born, raised and educated in the Shenandoah Valley and in Charlottesville, Virginia

Enclosed is my check for the next three years.

Bob Wenger
Taipei, Taiwan

December Editorial

This refers to your December editorial.

I have no real argument with your theme. Having been a landowner near the Blue Ridge at one time, I think there is a point which you may have overlooked.

Of course hunters can be just as decent—or as indecent—as hikers, mushroom pickers, or anyone else. There is no reason for landowners to carry a chip on their shoulders. There's no great moral issue here.

But it's just that some people who happen to own property like their animals and don't want shooting all over their land. I believe that is eminently reasonable.

Oliver W. Bagby
McLean

Just The Way You Are

I have enjoyed your magazine for several years, and am pleased to note that it has not changed much in that time. Make sure it doesn't

Being one who enjoys the outdoors, which includes a lot of wildlife watching and hunting, I have anxiously awaited each issue of the magazine and have nearly always had the anticipation satisfied. I have given gift subscriptions to avid hunters and to avid "animal lovers," and all profess their enjoyment. There is a balance between pictures and articles, and between hunting and wildlife preservation (not that these two are opposite to one another).

As magazines grow, they change, usually not for the better. I sometimes find myself writing after I notice the change . . . Don't change a thing.

R. Gray
Springfield

Give to Wildlife

Virginia's wildlife needs your help. With the tax filing season coming up, don't forget to use Line 24A on your state income tax form to give to the state's nongame and endangered species fund. Last year, only 3 percent of the 2 million people receiving a return on their taxes donated to the fund, with an average contribution of $10. Our donations were down by $100,000 last year, and with the addition of three additional check-offs on your income tax form this year, every dollar you give to wildlife in this state is crucial to their survival.

You can help! Your money will help with the recovery of our endangered spcies, and ensure that the unendangered wildlife of this state don't meet the same fate. Just think: If every person in the state receiving a return donated one dollar to the fund, our contributions would come close to $2 million!

Please don't forget us or the wildlife you care about this year on Line 24A. If you'd like more information on your state's nongame and endangered species program, please let us know. Write: Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Nongame and Endangered Species, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. □

Toll-Free Numbers

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries now has two toll-free numbers available to the general public. The first, instituted in 1986, is designed to handle game, fish, and boating law violations. The public is welcome to dial 1-800-237-5712 anytime they witness a violation, day or night, and an answering system will return call-back requests after hours. Callers may remain anonymous and are not required to testify in court.

The second toll-free number available, 1-800-252-7717, is a new general information number for the public. Staffed from 8:30 am -5 pm Mon-Fri, the number is available to those seeking information on hunting and fishing in the state, rules and regulations, and general wildlife information. □

Family Outdoors

Spike Knuth

Surviving Winter

Winter is upon us! The cold winds sweeping out of the north remind us to get our coats, boots, thermal underwear, gloves and heavy blankets. The coming of winter brings with it some drastic changes in the lifestyles of wildlife as well.

Like some people, many types of wildlife migrate to warmer climates. Some birds merely wander in winter rather than actually migrate. This is true of birds like the siskins, crossbills, purple finches, redpolls and evening grosbeaks.

Some creatures burrow in the mud to "tough out" the winter in a sort of suspended animation. These include amphibians—salamanders, frogs and toads. Reptiles—turtles, lizards and snakes—will burrow in mud or hide under leaves, piles of rocks and debris or in holes or dens.

Many mammals hibernate or go into a state of semi-hibernation during the cold months. Their metabolism—heartbeat, breathing and digestion is noticeably slowed, and body temperatures cool to that of their surroundings. Among the true hibernators are ground squirrels, jumping mice, bats and groundhogs. Prior to hibernation these animals lay up a good layer of fat. During its trance-like sleep, the groundhog burns this stored-up energy very slowly, its body heat just high enough to prevent freezing—about 37 degrees. While in this hibernation period, the groundhog burns up about 40% of its weight. While its heart may beat as fast as 200 times a minute in spring—with 80 being normal, during its winter sleep, it beats barely four or five times a minute, with irregular breathing, about one breath per minute.

Bears, skunks, raccoons, chipmunks and opossum are examples of semi-hibernators. This is, they become inactive for part of the winter, but will venture forth during mild periods and their body temperatures remain considerably higher than their surroundings.

For those mammals and birds that don't migrate or hibernate, shelter and food become the priorities of life. The little chipmunk, a semi-hibernator, lines its underground den with grasses and leaves and gathers and stores food for the winter. The white-tailed deer, however, remains active all winter Deer seek out thick shelters of laurel, rhododendron, hemlock, or other stands of evergreens or thick vegetation. They browse on various tree twigs, acorns and left-over agricultural crops and dried fruits.

Other mammals that must find proper shelter include the raccoon, which likes large hollow trees or logs; squirrels, too, like hollow trees or they'll build nests of twigs and leaves. Muskrats build lodges and food mounds of marsh vegetation, relying on underwater trails to go back and forth—even under the ice. Many smaller mammals utilize the dens of other mammals.

In the bird world, ruffed grouse seek out heavy evergreen stands, especially hemlock and cedar, for protection, or they will actually burrow into the snow which acts as an insulator that enables them to survive extreme cold. Grouse feed on seeds, acorns, dried fruits and available greens, turning to tree buds if food gets scarce. The grouse also grows "snowshoes." In the fall, hair-like appendages grow from its toes, enabling it to walk over the snow without sinking in. Wild turkeys have to scratch for their food and they will often feed with deer in heavy or icy snow cover.

Most songbirds will find sheltered areas in the wooded lee of a hill or mountain, and generally follow the sun throughout the day—staying in the extra warmth, keeping blood circulating to ward off the cold. One study showed that the chickadee's heart beats some 340 pulses per minute in summer but sped along at over 1300 beats a minute in severe, sub-zero weather. To aid it in keeping warm, the chickadee has an ample covering of downy, fluffy feathers which are fluffed up, trapping warm air from its body, insulating the little bird against the cold. Yet at this time, its feet may only be 30 degrees or 40 degrees F. which doesn't seem to bother the "little dynamo" since they are controlled from the little feathered and warm thigh muscle. To produce heat, however, the chickadee needs plenty of calorie-producing foods. It seeks out those hibernating insects and their eggs in rotted logs, tree bark and woody crevices.

Each animal is equipped physically or is given special abilities to cope with or withstand winter in different ways. Apparently they work, because these and other creatures seem to do a pretty good job of surviving winter. □

Safety

Winter Boating Blues

The sky may be gray, the chill wind whistles through the bare trees and the TV programs are not all that attractive. This is the time to think about spring and the beginning of the boating season. It is also the time to get ready by improving your boating knowledge and skills. Boat operators are responsible for the safety of their boats, passengers, and any damage the boat or its wake may cause. Ignorance of proper boat operation laws and rules related to boating is no excuse in the event of a serious problem or accident.

Today, with the number of boats and boaters increasing and consequent boat congestion, there are more navigational rules and related laws which every boater should know. Also, boating is an activity with a danger element because of the marine environment. With proper training, experience and judgement, boaters can manage and minimize the inherent risks. The Virginia State Boating Basic Course trains student boaters and helps them to develop knowledge and skills which will reduce risk, eliminate unreasonable risk and enable trained boaters to cope with unexpected situations requiring knowledge and skills. These free boating basic skills and seamanship courses are taught by volunteers who are well qualified professionals.

The state course is a six-lesson course, with an additional two hours for review and an exam. It is designed to teach boat handling, navigational rules, and to introduce legal and safe practices to boaters. The information is useful to both owner/operators and passengers who are just along for the fun. Knowing safe boating principles will prevent trouble as well as aid boaters in getting out of trouble.

In addition, the course is taught by experienced, state certified instructors and proof of successful completion is accepted by most insurance companies as qualification for insurance premium reductions.

The course content recognizes the fact that most fatal accidents are caused by falls overboard and non-fatal accidents are caused by collisions with other boats and fixed objects. Although fires and explosions occur less frequently, they account for a high percentage of property loss.

Course Content

The six-hour course covers the subject matter listed below:

I. All About Boats
Choosing the right boat
Classification
Basic boat hull
Watercraft
Motors

II. Legal Requirements
Registration
Equipment requirements

III. Rules of the Road
Basic safety regulations
Rules of the road
Navigational aids

IV. Getting Underway
Preparation
Knots
Getting underway
Maintenance
Cruising
Courtesy
Docking
Security
Anchoring
Storage

V. Accidents
Accidents
Visual distress signals
Emergencies
Accident reporting
Aquatic safety
Fire on board
Alcohol safety
First aid

VI. Special Topics
Weather
Water sports
White water
Dams
Sailboats
Locks
Glossary
Trailering

There is no cost for instruction, textbooks or other course materials. The course text is a basic book, however, and does not cover all aspects of boating. More advanced courses are provided by the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary and the United States Power Squadron.

The basic boating courses are available throughout Virginia and information on dates and location may be obtained by reaching any of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Boating Education coordinators listed below:

Ms. Elizabeth Johnson
District Coordinator
3812 Austin Avenue
Richmond, VA 23222
(804) 329-3228

Commander J. B. Earle, Jr.
District Coordinator
301 Randolph Street
Danville, VA 24541
(804) 791-4179

Col. E. L. Tucker
District Coordinator
610 Allen Mill Road
Yorktown, VA 23692
(804) 898-8151

Commodore T. J. Cochrane, Jr.
District Coordinator
332 Ridge Circle
Waynesboro, Va 22980
(703) 942-2771

Captain Robert T. Platt
District Coordinator
7704 Grovenor Court
Alexandria, VA 22310
(703) 971-5255

For additional information on Virginia State Boating Basics Courses, write: VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Attn: Education Division, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.—*William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer*

Virginia's Wildlife

The Carolina Chickadee

by
Nancy Hugo
photo by
Vinyard Brothers

Chickadees are with us all year in Virginia, but it's on the coldest days that we appreciate them the most. They're friendly, easy to spot, and fun to watch. Nothing takes the sting out of a cold day faster than a band of chickadees visiting the bird feeder.

We have two chickadees that breed in Virginia—black-capped chickadees and Carolina chickadees. I'd always thought the chickadees at my Ashland feeder were black-capped chickadees—after all, they had black caps. But I've since learned that most of the chickadees we see in the eastern part of the state are Carolina chickadees. The two species look almost exactly alike, but they are different species and have different ranges.

Carolina chickadees are permanent residents throughout Virginia except where the black-capped chickadee lives. The black-capped chickadee breeds in the highest mountains in the western part of the state and winters there at lower elevations. We do get some migrating black-capped chickadees here from the north in the winter (some winters we get lots and some winters we get few), but even these visiting black-capped chickadees are less and less common the farther east you go.

Most people—except naturalist Rob Simpson—will tell you how hard the Carolina and black-capped chickadees are to tell apart. Simpson, who has been studying chickadees for 14 years, will tell you that even his six-year-old son can tell them apart. The identifying mark Simpson finds most reliable is the configuration of the white markings on the wing. The black-capped chickadee's wing looks like it has a white hockey stick on it. The white stick is formed by black-capped's primary wing feathers; the blade is formed by the white on the edges of the smaller wing coverts. Associate both hockey sticks and the black-capped chickadee with the north, and you'll be able to hang onto the association, says Simpson.

The black-capped chickadee is also a bit larger than the Carolina and has a whiter cheek patch. The Carolina's cheek patch never looks all white; it grades from lightest in the front through shades of grey until it fuses into the grey at the back of the neck. The birds' bibs are also a little different. The Carolina chickadee's white bib ends in a sharp line; the black-capped chickadees's bib is longer and has a more ragged outline at the bottom.

Some experts say it's easier to tell the chickadees apart by their songs than their field marks. The black-capped chickadee's song is a clearly whistled "fee-bee", and his "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" call is slow and deliberate. The Carolina's call is more hurried and an octave higher than that of the black-capped. Ears that can't differentiate between octaves on the piano will have trouble hearing the difference, however, and the chickadees' calls can be misleading since individuals sometimes deliver incomplete or "incorrect" calls. The issue is futher muddied by the presence of hybrid birds in some areas. Rob Simpson thinks there are fewer hybrid birds around than some people who can't tell the two species apart think, but hybrids have been reported, particularly in the Mountain Lake area, and they exhibit some of the characteristics of each species.

The chickadee's favorite habitat is rural woodlands. Simpson finds they particularly like areas rich in red cedars and tend to shy away from flood plains. They nest in cavities they've excavated themselves in rotting tree stubs or fenceposts. Sometimes they'll also nest in natural cavities, birdhouses, or abandoned woodpecker holes.

Chickadees are highly insectivorous and they perform dazzling acrobatic acts as they swing in every direction on their strong legs and feet searching for caterpillars, beetles, moths, and other insects. One expert in Michigan estimated that the chickadees destroyed eight thousand million insects in that state every year. In the winter, they make up for the lack of insect food with plant matter, and they are particularly fond of sunflower seeds and suet at the bird feeder.

The Carolina chickadee is reportedly not quite as friendly as the black-capped, but the black-capped chickadee is famous for its friendliness. It's the tamest American bird, according to one expert, and stories abound of backyard birders who have taught them to feed from their hands.

As you might expect, the popular chickadee has been adopted as the state bird of several states. The black-capped chickadee is the state bird of both Maine and Massachusetts and the Carolina chickadee was once the state bird of North Carolina. Unfortunately for North Carolina, however, the chickadee, which is a member of the titmouse family, is sometimes called "tomtit." When North Carolina began to be known as the "Tomtit State" ("tomtit" also being a colloquialism for a small and insignificant person), North Carolinians didn't like it. Legislators started a campaign to get school children to choose a better state bird and they finally settled on the cardinal. Undoubtedly, the Carolina chickadee was friendlier before this affront. □